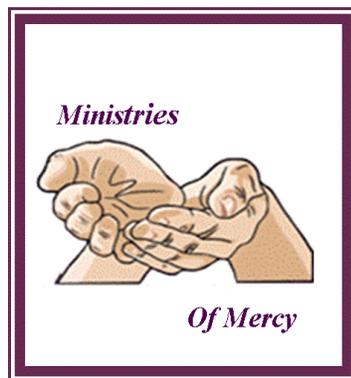


# Parish Social Ministry

## Parish Social Ministry/Respect Life Handbook Diocese of St. Petersburg



***“A church that doesn’t provoke any crises, a gospel that doesn’t unsettle, a word of God that doesn’t get under anyone’s skin, a word of God that doesn’t touch the real sin of a society in which it is being proclaimed....  
What gospel is that?”***

- Archbishop Oscar Romero

## Office of Life Ministry

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Life Ministries in the Diocese of St. Petersburg are grounded in our common heritage of Scripture and Catholic Social Teaching. The Office of Life Ministry serves as a resource for parish leaders who are developing life, peace and justice ministries. Pro-Life and Pro-Justice parish ministries fall under the umbrella of Parish Social Ministry.

Social ministry begins with baptism and the call each of us receives to actively participate in bringing about the reign of God. The parish, as a constitutive part of its mission, provides an organized outlet for the community to respond to that baptismal call. The bishops developed this message in their document, *Communities of Salt and Light*:

*"We see the parish dimensions of social ministry not as an added burden, but as a part of what keeps a parish alive and makes it truly Catholic. Effective social ministry helps the parish not only do more, but be more—more of a reflection of the gospel, more of a worshiping and evangelizing people, more of a faithful community. It is an essential part of parish life... The pursuit of justice and peace is an essential part of what makes a parish Catholic."*

*(Communities of Salt and Light: Reflections on the Social Mission of the Parish.)*

Parish social ministry strives to help parishioners understand and act on Catholic Social Teaching. This handbook is designed to give leaders an overview of Catholic Social Teachings and how to set up a parish committee. It is then divided into two sections: 1) How to set up a Parish Social Ministry Coordination Team based on the USCCB document, *Communities of Salt and Light: Reflections on the Social Mission of the Parish* 2) Parish Respect Life Ministry, based on the USCCB *Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities*.

## Themes of Catholic Social Teaching

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### **Life and Dignity of the Human Person**

The Catholic Church proclaims that human life is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. This belief is the foundation of all the principles of our social teaching. In our society, human life is under direct attack from abortion and euthanasia. The value of human life is being threatened by cloning, embryonic stem cell research, and the use of the death penalty. Catholic teaching also calls on us to work to avoid war. Nations must protect the right to life by finding increasingly effective ways to prevent conflicts and resolve them by peaceful means. We believe that every person is precious, that people are more important than things, and that the measure of every institution is whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person.

“Every person, from the moment of conception to natural death, has inherent dignity and a right to life consistent with that dignity” (*Sharing Catholic Social Teaching*).

### **Call to Family, Community, and Participation**

The person is not only sacred but also social. How we organize our society in economics and politics, in law and policy directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. Marriage and the family are the central social institutions that must be supported and strengthened, not undermined. We believe people have a right and a duty to participate in society, seeking together the common good and well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable.

“The fact that human beings are social by nature indicates that the betterment of the person and the improvement of society depend on each other...humanity by its very nature stands completely in need of life in society” (Vatican II, *The Church in the Modern World*).

### **Rights and Responsibilities**

The Catholic tradition teaches that human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met. Therefore, every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to those things required for human decency. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities-to one another, to our families, and to the larger society.

“Those who are more influential, because they have a greater share of goods and common services, should feel responsible for the weaker and be ready to share with them all they possess” (*On Social Concern*).

### **Option for the Poor and Vulnerable**

A basic moral test is how our most vulnerable members are faring. In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition recalls the story of the Last Judgment (Mt 25:31-46) and instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.

“As individuals and as a nation, therefore, we are called to make a fundamental ‘option for the poor.’ The obligation to evaluate social and economic activity from the viewpoint of the poor and the powerless arises from the radical command to love one’s neighbor as one’s self. Those who are marginalized and whose rights are denied have privileged claims if society is to provide justice for all. This obligation is deeply rooted in Christian belief”(*Economic Justice for All*).

### **The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers**

The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God’s creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers must be respected--the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to the organization and joining of unions, to private property, and to economic initiative.

“Work is more than a way to make a living; it is an expression of our dignity and a form of continuing participation in God’s Creation” (*A Century of Catholic Social Teaching*).

### **Solidarity**

We are one human family whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers, wherever they may be. Loving our neighbor has global dimensions in a shrinking world. At the core of the virtue of solidarity is the pursuit of justice and peace. Pope Paul VI taught that “if you want peace, work for justice.” The Gospel calls us to be peacemakers. Our love for all our sisters and brothers demands that we promote peace in a world surrounded by violence and conflict.

“The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men and women of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ” (Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*).

### **Care for God’s Creation**

We show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation. Care for the earth is not just an Earth Day slogan, it is a requirement of our faith. We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God’s creation. This environmental challenge has fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored.

“We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God’s creation.” (*Sharing Catholic Social Teaching*).

This summary of the Themes of Catholic Social Teaching is taken from *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions*, 1998. (No. 5-281)

## The Two Feet of Catholic Social Teaching

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“Let no one attempt with small gifts of charity to exempt themselves from the great duties imposed by justice” (Pius XI, *On Atheistic Communism*, #49).

It is often said that there are two feet of Catholic Social Teaching: charity and justice. Parish social ministry should include both, helping the People of God to walk on two feet. People generally like to engage in works of charity. We can see how our service or resources are benefitting our sisters and brothers. Advocacy work is harder to understand and does not bring immediate gratification.

### Charity

- Meets immediate need
- Addresses symptoms
- Relies on generosity
- Some works of charity should allow for contact with the poor/oppressed

Matthew 25

<sup>37</sup>*“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?’* <sup>38</sup>*“When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?’* <sup>39</sup>*“When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’*

<sup>40</sup>*“The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’* <sup>45</sup>*“He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’”*

Most Christians understand the importance of the Corporal Works of Mercy. Our faith calls us to go beyond this to ask why God’s children are hungry, naked, homeless, in prison and so on. Works of charity do involve sacrifice, but justice involved a deeper, more sustained commitment.

### Justice (Advocacy)

- Requires communal action
- Focus on rights
- Social structures
- Works for long-term social change
- Addresses the causes of injustice/oppression
- Relies on just laws

Justice is also inextricably connected to peace. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, *“Justice will bring about peace; right will produce calm and serenity”* (Isaiah 32: 17).

*“Open your mouth on behalf of the dumb, and for the rights of the destitute; Open your mouth, decree what is just, defend the needy and the poor.”* Proverbs 31:8-9

**Charity**  
Direct  
Social Services

Help individuals  
meet their  
present needs:

- Serve in a soup kitchen
- Sponsor a refugee family
- Mentor and tutor
- Donate food or clothing
- Collect items for a Pregnancy Center

**Justice**  
Social Change

Correct long-term problems  
in communities:

- Participate in community self-help projects
- Advocate for just public policies
- Develop local community enterprises

## The Art of Catholic Social Teaching

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### ACT – REFLECT – TRANSFORM

This model is described in the *Leader's Guide to Sharing Catholic Social Teaching*, pages 12-14.

The ART Model is useful when one has identified a social problem or a need. In this model, acts of charity give rise to reflection that leads us to the work of justice.

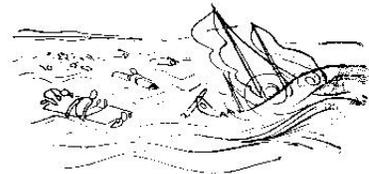
The first step is to ACT in charity to alleviate the symptoms of the social problem. It involves meeting any immediate and urgent needs such as feeding the hungry, sheltering the hurricane victim, protecting victims of domestic abuse and collecting recyclable materials. Some works of charity do not put us into direct contact with those being served, but it is important that parishioners have a variety of opportunities to engage in service that connects them to the poor and vulnerable. When we do so, “The issued takes on a face; it becomes more real to us” (p. 13). It is also imperative that the parish committee properly prepare the parishioners to action and ensure the dignity of those being served.

Once the immediate need has been met, REFLECTion must take place. In this step, we do research to ask why the injustice exists. We listen to those directly affected by the social problem and ask the deeper questions that get at the underlying causes of the problem. We try to determine who has the power in this situation. We try to determine who the winners are and who the losers are. We apply Scriptures and Catholic Social Teaching to social problems.

The third step is to work to TRANSFORM the structure(s) that contributes to the suffering and injustice. In this step, we address the underlying causes of the problems and work for long-term social transformation that promotes just social policies and structures. “We can transform our world through... changing social values, empowering low-income people, advocating for just public policies, buying or boycotting goods based on social values, adopting lifestyle changes, and investing in socially responsible corporations” (p. 14). These systemic changes are works of justice. They may be done individually, but are probably better in done in community.

## The Parable of the Parish

On a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks often occur, there was once a crude little life-saving station. The building was just a hut and there was only one boat, but the completely devoted members kept a constant watch



over the sea and, with no thought for themselves, they went out day and night tirelessly searching for the lost. Many were saved by this station so it became famous. Some of those who were saved and various others in the surrounding areas wanted to become associated with the station and give of their time and money and effort for the support of its work. New boats were bought and crews were trained. The little life-saving station grew.

Some members of the lifesaving station were unhappy that the building was so crude and poorly equipped. They felt that a more comfortable place should be provided as the first refuge of those saved from the sea. So they replaced the cots with beds and put better furniture in and enlarged it to a more elaborate building. Now the life-saving station became a popular gathering place for its members who were proud of it and they redecorated it beautifully and furnished it exquisitely because they used it as a kind of club. Fewer of the members were now interested in going to sea on life-saving missions so they hired lifeboat crews to do this work. The life-saving motif still prevailed in the club decorations, however, and there was a liturgical lifeboat in the room where club initiations were held.

About this time, a large ship was wrecked off the coast and the hired crews brought in boatloads of cold, wet, half-drowned people. They were dirty and wounded and sick and some had differently colored skin. The beautiful new club was left untidy and muddy. So the property committee immediately had a shower house built outside the club where the victims of shipwreck could be cleaned up before coming inside.

At the next meeting there was a split in the club membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club's activities as being somewhat beneath them and an unpleasant hindrance to the normal social life of the club. Some of the members insisted that life-saving was their primary purpose and pointed out that they were known as a life-saving station. But they were finally voted down and told that if they wanted to save all the various kinds of people, with different colors of skin and strange languages and odd religions, who were shipwrecked on those waters, they could start their own life-saving station down the coast. They did.

As the years went by the new station experienced the same changes that had occurred in the old. It evolved into a club, and yet another lifesaving station was founded. History continued to repeat itself, and if you visit that seacoast today, you find a number of exclusive clubs along that shore.

Shipwrecks are still frequent in those waters, but most of the people drown.

# Steps in forming your committee...

1. The pastor appoints one or more persons to lead the parish Social Ministry/Respect Life committee. The parish staff generally is already assigned to other responsibilities, but perhaps someone on staff could provide oversight and direction for one or two capable laypersons in the parish who feel called to this ministry.

2. The parish office provides the chairperson's name(s) and address(es) to the diocesan Office of Life Ministry

3. The office of Life Ministry provides materials, support and contacts of other parish ministry leaders who may offer support and guidance.

4. In some cases, a deanery coordinator will be able to offer guidance; answer questions discuss deanery and diocesan-wide activities

5. The chairperson seeks and enlists other parishioners who together will form a core or steering group.

This group should include leaders of other parish ministries who may not have time to be active members but would be helpful as consultants. Many Parish Social Ministry/Respect Life projects will intertwine with other parish ministries, and this provides opportunities for collaboration.

This steering group will help to conduct one-on-ones to get to know more people in the parish and become familiar with their interests and skills. This will help identify potential leaders.

6. Team members study materials and key documents provided. This study and reflection process should be ongoing. Much of the information should be passed along to the congregation in appropriate ways.

7. Team members review the parish profile (size of parish, age mix of parishioners, economic and social factors, and other demographics) to identify how they may best serve the parishioners and the entire community that lives within the parish boundaries. This may be done in conjunction with the Pastoral Council. The Diocesan Office of Parish Ministry Support can assist with this process.

8. The team members draw up a list of possible initiatives, projects, or activities that could take place in the parish over the next few months. Be sure to submit the list to the pastor for approval before advertising or taking action.

## Qualities to Look for in a Parish Social Ministry Leader

*The Parish Social Ministry Leadership Team is composed of many people working together. Here are some qualities to look for in effective PSM leaders.*



### **Team members are leaders, not doers.**

The purpose of a PSM Leadership Team is to assist *all* the baptized to live out their call to be Christ to the world. Its job is to mobilize the energies of the whole parish. In so doing, team members can multiply their efforts a hundredfold, and—more importantly—allow more people to share in the joy of serving.

### **Team members know how to listen.**

They value other people's ideas and listen to find out what the needs are and what skills and resources the parish has to meet them.

### **Team members are good planners.**

Effective leadership doesn't just happen. It requires organization, goal-setting and planning. (These are skills that can be learned.)

### **Team members collaborate with other parish organizations and, on occasion, community groups.**

Leaders are not "lone wolves." They work with others to achieve a common purpose.

### **Team members are communicators.**

They share what is happening with the entire parish regularly and consistently.

### **Team members are welcomers.**

They know the importance of continually inviting and recruiting people for social ministry. Good social ministry needs people, people, people!

### **Team members value diversity.**

They are always looking for opportunities to invite a wide variety of people to take part in social ministry, particularly those from minority groups. *All* the people in the parish need to have a voice.

### **Team members are practical.**

They are able to find doable projects that focus parish efforts to achieve results consistent with the parish mission.

### **Team members are persons of faith.**

Leaders are people of prayer. What they do isn't just "busy-ness" but arises from a deep spirituality. They connect their actions with God's plan and purpose for the world. When the going gets hard (and it will!), it is faith that keeps them going.

*(Adapted from Tom Ulrich, Parish Social Ministry: Strategies for Success.)*

## **United within our Deanery and Diocese**

Your parish community is invited to share their activities with the other parishes in our diocese. The Diocese of St. Petersburg currently includes 79 parishes and missions, which are divided geographically into 7 areas referred to as “deaneries.” **The seven deaneries within the diocese are:** Lower Pinellas, Upper Pinellas, West Hillsborough, East Hillsborough, Pasco, Hernando and Citrus.

Parish Social Ministry and Respect Life committees are encouraged to work together with other parishes. Where they are not already in place, area coordinators representing the Office of Life Ministry will be set up to arrange periodic deanery meetings for sharing, support, and inter-parish projects.

## **Ten “Commandments” for a Parish Social Ministry/Respect Life Committee**

1. Pray individually and as a community for the success of your ministry and faith share with members of your group at each meeting/gathering
2. Continue to grow in your understanding of Scripture and Catholic social teaching. Be willing to attend training sessions. (God qualifies the called.)
3. Make sure that the membership on your committee reflects the diversity of the community (youth, the aged, minorities, persons with disabilities, etc.)
4. Spend time discerning your mission and set realistic goals. Revisit these goals frequently.
5. Resist the temptation to impose a particular agenda. Avoid partisanship.
6. Plan to address a range of social issues over time.
7. Provide meaningful opportunities for the People of God to engage in the social mission of the Church.
8. Have a high regard for the teachings of the Church.
9. Work in conjunction with the parish council as well as the liturgical and educational ministries in the parish. Be willing to accept direction from the pastor.
10. Celebrate your accomplishments!

# Parish Social Ministry Committee

*“We see the parish dimensions of social ministry not as an added burden, but as a part of what keeps a parish alive and makes it truly Catholic.*

*Effective social ministry helps the parish not only do more, but be more—more of a reflection of the gospel, more of a worshipping and evangelizing people, more of a faithful community. It is an essential part of parish life...*

*The pursuit of justice and peace is an essential part of what makes a parish Catholic”*

-Communities of Salt and Light: Reflections on the Social Mission of the Parish

## **ORGANIZING A PARISH SOCIAL MINISTRY COORDINATION TEAM**

Building a successful parish-based social ministry effort of the kind envisioned in *Communities of Salt and Light* requires tapping each and every able Catholic’s baptismal call to serve. There is much ministry to do but the good news is that there are plenty of baptized sisters and brothers to invite to participate. The Parish Social Ministry Coordination Team is where ministry leaders with various talents, specializations, and passions connect in their common goal of building a Culture of Life. This committee models our communal concern for the dignity of the human person, as evidenced by their work on a range of life, peace and justice issues.

One important challenge is to create an effective structure for carrying out this important work. The vision for parish social ministry outlined in *Communities of Salt and Light* has profound implications for the way we organize and structure social ministry in our parishes. In the past, the group responsible for social ministry, often called the social concerns committee, was often made up of the very few people who stuffed the Thanksgiving baskets and volunteered at the homeless shelter. *Communities of Salt and Light* challenges us to completely rethink the role, focus and structure of the Parish Social Ministry Coordination Team (from this point forward, the “Coordination Team”).

An important starting point for building or strengthening a “Coordination Team” is the pastor, the parish staff, and the parish council. While some may want to be more involved than others, it is essential that the pastor, staff, and leaders of the parish be kept informed at all times.

Since *Communities of Salt and Light* was issued by the United States bishops in 1993-94, many parishes have tried to make this vision a reality. The following description draws on these experiences. It is a model not in the sense that it is “ideal” or rigid, but in the sense that it provides an example. It includes all the elements described in *Communities of Salt and Light* but is intended to be adjusted to meet the unique needs of each parish. We realize that no two parish social concerns coordination teams will be identical and that most parishes are always in the process of developing and strengthening their social ministry programs.

### **Three Basic Messages**

*Communities of Salt and Light* provides three key messages that have implications for the responsibilities and structures of the “Coordination Team”:

- (1) Our social mission should be **integrated throughout parish life**. As the story of the Last Judgment in Matthew’s Gospel reminds us, in the end we will all (not just the usual suspects on the social concerns committee) be judged by how we have cared for the least among us. This means that the Catholic social mission is an essential part of the faith life of every able Catholic. It must be woven into education programs so that all Catholics learn about Catholic social teaching. It must be reflected in the prayer and worship of our faith community. And it must include a wide range of opportunities for members of our parishes to act on the social dimensions of our faith.
- (2) Social concerns committees, in their leadership capacity, **should organize the work, not do the work**. The primary role of these leaders is to provide opportunities, invite and recruit members of their faith community to become involved in Catholic social mission. For example, the leaders of the parish’s program to support a local soup kitchen can do their job well only by creating opportunities and inviting other parishioners to volunteer. This is not to suggest that members of “Coordination Team” should absent themselves from being involved in the doing of the work; rather, in the role of leader/organizer/planner, the critical task at hand is to organize, invite, recruit, orchestrate and create opportunities for the parish—and *all* of its members—to become engaged.
- (3) Parish social ministry must include both **efforts to provide direct service or outreach to people in need and efforts to work for justice and peace by shaping the policies, programs, and structures of society**. These two dimensions of the Catholic social mission are essential and complementary.

## **Basic Structure**

In *Communities of Salt and Light*, the bishops highlight seven elements for effective parish social ministry:

- Prayer and Worship
- Education and Formation
- Family, Work, Citizenship
- Outreach and Charity
- Legislative Advocacy
- Community Organizing
- Global Solidarity

Parishes that seek to realize this vision will structure their “Coordination Team” so that someone or some group/committee is responsible for making sure each element comes to life in the parish. In other words, there is a person or a group of people responsible for organizing activity in each area listed above.

It is important to keep in mind that this is only an example. In larger parishes there may be several people working in each area. In smaller parishes, one person may take the lead in one or more areas. There may also be other ways to organize the work to ensure that all elements of the *Communities of Salt and Light* framework are covered and that an engaging and effective social ministry can occur in the parish.

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

Each activity area shown in the diagram represents an area of responsibility or function that might be filled by one or a few people or by several sub-groups. The following descriptions of the areas include examples for illustration purposes. In each of the areas described, it is essential for social ministry leaders to respect the expertise of those parish staff members and volunteer leaders who are responsible for, or involved in, related ministries or programs.

### **Prayer and Worship**

“Social ministry that is not genuinely rooted in prayer can easily burn itself out. On the other hand, worship that does not reflect the Lord’s call to conversion, service and justice can become pious ritual an empty of the gospel” (*Communities of Salt and Light: Reflections on the Social Mission of the Parish*, p. 5).

Prayer must anchor our ministry. It is in prayer that we discern God’s will for us and gain the strength to be agents of change in the world. The Prayer and Worship leader or team of the “Coordination Team” is not the same as the parish Liturgy Committee. This is a person or group whose job is to work with those who plan parish liturgies, pointing out opportunities to connect Sunday liturgies to Catholic social mission and organizing prayer services focused on life, charity, justice, and peace. It is essential that these activities be carried out in a way that is respectful of the expertise and areas of responsibility of those whose job is to plan liturgies.

Examples:

- The parish social ministry prayer and worship leader(s) might plan a prayer service and work with parish liturgy planners to include general intercessions to mark feast days and other events that highlight the social mission of the church. Examples might include:
  - Prayer service or Rosary walk for the anniversary of Roe v. Wade
  - Homily helps and special intercessions for Farmworker Sunday
  - Liturgy of lament or tolling of the bells on the day of an Execution
  - Special Stations of the Cross such as Pro-Life, The Way of the Migrant, or Operation Rice Bowl
- Work with the parish liturgy planners to include food, clothing or other collection items as part of the presentation of the gifts.
- Organize a “prayer network” to pray about issues of human life, justice and peace.
- Encourage homilies that reflect real-life stories about those who are engaged in social ministry and those who are faced with injustice.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- How does our committee regularly pray and faith-share on Scripture and Catholic social teaching?
- How are justice themes integrated in our parish liturgies through music, preaching, prayers of the faithful, etc.?
- What special parish celebrations of the Eucharist or prayer services call people to a better understanding of issues of life, peace and justice?
- Does parish prayer activities held throughout the year reflect all/most of the principles of Catholic social teaching?

**Preaching and Education:**

“We need to build local communities of faith where our social teaching is central, not fringe; where social ministry is integral, not optional: where it is the work of every believer, not just the mission of a few committed people and committees” (U.S. Catholic Bishops, *Communities of Salt and Light*).

Our social doctrines are constitutive to our faith, yet we often fail to fully communicate the social dimension of the Gospel. Because of this, our Catholic social teachings are commonly referred to as our *best kept secrets*. The social message of the Gospel must be communicated consistently in all of the educational efforts of the parish. The primary role of the Education and Formation Leader(s) is to ensure that the social mission of the Church and Catholic Social Teaching is integral to all education and formation efforts. It is essential that the Education and Formation Leader(s) work with the Director of Faith Formation, Youth Ministry Coordinator and School Principal to develop a plan for the year that not only ensures that the Catholic social mission is explicitly taught, but also respects the expertise and areas of responsibility of the parish’s education leaders.

Examples:

- Work with the parish Faith Formation staff and the School Principal, if applicable, to ensure that the Catholic social mission is incorporated into all parish educational programs.
  - Organize an in-service on the Catholic social mission for catechists or the school faculty, or provide them with a list of educational resources on Catholic social teaching.
  - Plan a session on the Catholic social mission for sacramental preparation programs or the RCIA candidates and catechumens.
  - Sponsor JustFaith or a Journey to Justice Program in the parish.
  - Keep education staff or leaders apprised of what is being planned by the “Coordination Team” and develop a plan for involving students in some of these outreach and advocacy activities
- Provide clergy members with homily helps special events such as the Lenten Operation Rice Bowl program or Respect Life Sunday
- Offer faith-sharing materials focused on social issues to parish ministry leaders that may use them to open their meetings
- Highlight social justice themes in scripture-study sessions.
- Sponsor adult faith formation sessions in various issue areas such as end-of-life care, environmental justice, human trafficking, racism, natural family planning, justice for immigrants, etc.
- Utilize the parish bulletin and website for information on issues of life, peace and justice.
- Offer “immersion” experiences in which participants encounter a social issue more directly.

Questions for reflection and discussion:

- Does the preaching in our parish regularly reflect the social dimension of our faith?
- How do we support and encourage our clergy in their homily preparation?
- How do we connect with and support the educational efforts of our school and faith formation programs for youth and adults?
- Do all sacramental preparation programs include discussion of the Church’s social mission and opportunities/suggestions for action?
- Do we have a plan for covering a range of issues over the next 2-5 years?
  - Do these issues cover all of the principles of Catholic social teaching?

**Supporting Family, Work and Citizenship:**

"Catholicism does not call us to abandon the world, but to help shape it. This does not mean leaving worldly tasks and responsibilities, but transforming them" (*Everyday Christianity: To Hunger and Thirst for Justice*).

We are called to be good stewards and good citizens. Our parishes should help people to live their faith in the world as spouses, parents, workers, students, investors, community leaders, advocates and citizens. Whether it is one person or a group of people, it is important that someone take responsibility for finding ways to help parishioners live their faith in everyday life—at home, at work, and in their communities.

Examples:

- Sponsor or support ongoing small Christian communities/faith-sharing groups which help people to connect their faith to their everyday life.
- Organize a workshop on good stewardship or socially responsible investing
- Regularly include information about church teaching on “faithful citizenship” in the bulletin and on the parish website.
- Promote marriage renewal programs and parenting support/seminars
- Organize occupation reflections groups (e.g., when people in similar occupations or professions gather to discuss how their faith shapes their work lives).
- Pray the ‘Litany of Work’ on special occasions such as Labor Day, St. Joseph’s feast day, and before or after parish meetings.
- Affirm minority families by holding special celebrations on feast days and holidays that have particular cultural significance to them (i.e. Kwanza, Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe).

Questions for reflection and discussion:

- Are parishioners given opportunities to connect their faith to their everyday lives through faith-sharing?
- What on-going opportunities for conversion and renewal are offered?
- Is lifelong faith formation for discipleship part of the ordinary life of the parish?

**Direct Service (Outreach and Charity):**

“Parish efforts to meet human needs also provides valuable experience, expertise, and credibility in advocating for public policy to address the forces that leave people in need of our charity” (*Communities of Salt and Light*).

This is the person or group that focuses on direct service activities to people in need. Through charity, we reach out to those who are suffering now. In some parishes, this team may be made up of leaders who organize various ongoing outreach projects or programs (e.g., St. Vincent de Paul, Gabriel Project, Thanksgiving baskets, etc.). Where outreach programs have been active for a long time, it is important to connect them to the larger social ministry effort in ways that respect the knowledge and experience of those who have been working hard on parish outreach.

Examples:

- Organize parishioners to serve once a month at a soup kitchen, or to fold clothes every week at a clothing distribution center.
- Set up a collection of blankets for homeless people or a collection of food for Thanksgiving baskets.
- Organize a parish day to volunteer for a community organization such as Habitat for Humanity or Special Olympics.
- Assist organizations like the St. Vincent de Paul Society and Catholic Charities with service opportunities

Questions for reflection and discussion:

- How does our parish support the needs of the wider community?
- How are parish outreach efforts connected to advocacy and other forms of social action?
- Do some/most parish outreach activities provide opportunities for meaningful interaction with the poor/oppressed?

**Legislative Advocacy:**

“Parishes need to promote a revived sense of political responsibility calling Catholics to be informed and active citizens.”(*Communities of Salt and Light*).

The lobbyists who represent the Bishops emphasize that legislators need to hear from their constituents (the people who live in their districts). That is why we ask the local Catholic communities to become involved. The Catholic Conference staffs (national and state) provide very clear and brief overviews of each proposed statute or amendment. Our diocese has a newly trained Social Action Team ready to make district office visits when key issues arise. You may be called up to join them as a constituent.

The parish should create or promote networks where parishioners engage in efforts to create or change state and federal legislation to reflect just and compassionate social policy. The Legislative Advocacy Leader or Team is the person or group that creates opportunities for parishioners to be involved in working on public policies related to life, justice and peace. Our national, state, and local Bishops encourage us to communicate with our legislators regarding many issues of paramount importance for human life, death, and dignity. Legislators have to deal with so many issues and so many pieces of legislation that they are often unfamiliar with the substance of what they are asked to vote on. The communications and insights of their constituents, respectfully offered, can be very helpful to them.

Examples:

- Promote the legislative advocacy networks of organizations such as the Florida Catholic Conference, the United States Catholic Conference, the National Committee for a Human Life Amendment and Catholic Relief Services.
- Develop a system for communicating legislative action alerts (i.e. phone tree, bulletin announcement or website posting) for those who are unable to receive Email Action Alerts.
- Invite local elected officials to meet with parishioners about important local issues or invite speakers to discuss church teaching on public policy issues.
- Send a delegation to Catholic Days at the Capitol in Tallahassee each March. Every year during the Florida Legislative Session, the Bishops of Florida concelebrate a Red Mass for those who serve our state government. The Bishops invite Catholic lay people from around the state to join them at the Mass to thank God and to invoke His assistance for these public officials. In addition, the Bishops host a luncheon for Catholic legislators and the laity from their districts. The visitors are encouraged to visit their legislators at the Capitol.
- On occasion, the nature of pending legislation and/or a specific legislative situation may call for an intensive public outcry in an effort to either support or defeat legislation being considered. These requests for parish-wide campaigns will always originate from the diocesan Office of Life Ministry on behalf of the Bishops, never from other groups. By maintaining a visible social ministry effort in your parish and keeping parishioners aware of issues, you can help make people more receptive and responsive to these diocese-wide appeals for support in the form of written postcards/letters.

In an election year:

- Parish bulletin notices placed in advance of the deadlines for registration can urge everyone to make sure that they are registered to vote, and encourage voting on Election Day.
- Arrange for those who are unable to travel outside their homes to be registered. This should be advertised in the parish bulletin.
- Assist shut-ins in getting their absentee ballots and have drivers available to help others to the polls. This service, too, should be advertised in the parish bulletin. This is a good project for collaboration with the parish's women's guild, Holy Name, Knights of Columbus, and/or other church-affiliated service groups.
- Sponsor a nonpartisan voter registration drive (refer to the Florida Catholic Conference Election and Political Activities Guide).

Questions for reflection and discussion:

- How does our parish educate as to our on-going role as faithful citizens?
- Does our parish/committee offer opportunities to learn about the moral dimension of public policy issues affecting the poor and the vulnerable?
- How effective has the parish been in involving the community in advocacy efforts?

### **Community Organizing:**

The Catholic Church in the United States has a long history of supporting community organizing projects that empower people in low-income communities to improve their neighborhoods and their lives. One of the key ways we do this is through the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD), a collection taken in parishes nationwide each year through which grants are given to local community organizations. The role of the Community Organizing Leader or Team has two key components: (1) providing information to parishioners about the CCHD collection so that they see it not as a burden, but as a valuable opportunity to support self-help efforts in low-income communities; and (2) enabling and encouraging parishioners to become involved in community organizing projects that are active in the local community.

Examples:

- Promote the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) collection.
- Research and encourage participation in local Homeless Coalitions and our CCHD funded community organizing groups: FAST in Pinellas County and HOPE in Hillsborough County.
- Bring low-income leaders from local community organizing groups to the parish to share their stories and describe their work in the community.

Questions for reflection and discussion:

- Does our parish explain the work of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development before the annual collection?
- Does our parish participate in a community organizing group such as FAST or HOPE or promote the work of a group such as the Homeless Coalition?

## **Global Solidarity and Global Justice and Peace**

Catholic social teaching proclaims that we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they live... 'Loving our neighbor' has global dimensions in an interdependent world" (*Sharing Catholic Social Teaching*).

As members of a universal Church, we are called to be bridge-builders with our sisters and brothers around the world. A key test of a parish's "Catholicity" is its willingness to go beyond its boundaries to serve those in need and work for global justice and peace. A common perception is that it is easier for parishioners to find ways to respond to local needs than to identify ways they can make a real difference for people half a world away. Therefore, the Global Solidarity and Peace Leader or Team is responsible for organizing opportunities for parishioners to respond to the needs of our sisters and brothers around the world. Since the mission of Catholic Relief Services is to promote global solidarity and peace, promoting and organizing its wide variety of programs can be central to this team's efforts.

Examples:

- Establish a sister parish relationship with a parish in another land.
- Organize a mission trip to another country
- Bring in speakers who have recently returned from overseas or share information about the Catholic Relief Services Collection
- Promote Operation Rice Bowl, Food Fast or Work of Human Hands
- Commemorate special observances that lend to education about solidarity: National Migration Week, Farmworker Sunday, World AIDS Day, etc.

Questions for reflection and discussion:

- How does the parish help parishioners become more aware of the needs of their brothers and sisters in our diocese? In our state? Around the globe?
- How do we as a parish take meaningful and effective action aimed at supporting peace and justice locally and globally?
- How does the parish build understanding and relationships among people of different races, ethnicities, nationality and economic status within our own community? How do we build a sense of belonging to a world-wide community?

# PSM Success Worksheet

## How Well Are We Integrating PSM with the Rest of the Parish?

1. To what extent is there a system of regular communication (i.e., face to face meetings and written reports) between the parish pastoral leadership and PSM team?
2. To what extent does that communication update and fully inform each party about activities that have taken place or are being planned?
3. To what extent is the regular reporting and integration of social ministry activities at liturgical celebrations and services?
  - Bulletin/newsletter descriptions and clip art
  - Announcements at Mass
  - Weekly inclusion of social ministry work in the “Prayers of the Faithful”
  - Regular connection of social ministry work in homilies and reflections
  - Social ministry recognition and commissioning during appropriate liturgies such as Holy Thursday’s washing of the feet
  - Activities of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, Catholic Relief Services and Respect Life described at their designated “seasons”
4. Are there adult education/formation opportunities on Catholic social teaching provided (at least) during Advent and Lent?
5. Are Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD), Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and Respect Life materials distributed annually?
6. Does the review for orthodoxy and selection of religious education materials used in the parish include adherence to the full teaching of Catholic social teaching as described in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the U.S. Bishops’ *Communities of Salt & Light*?
7. Do small faith groups promoted and supported by the parish utilize material that has a social ministry action component?
8. Does the parish pastoral council have a connection to the PSM work being done in the name of the parish? (That connection can be either formal through a designated representative or informal through some type of reporting mechanism.)

9. Do the PSM team leaders have a regular (probably on a quarterly basis) meeting where efforts are described and celebrated and skills training is offered?

10. Are all members of the parish invited to join the ministry in some manner and on a continuing basis?

- Prayer networks given specific social ministry intentions to place on prayer lists
- Bulletin invitations for joining specific ministries, including whom to contact and how
- Systematic and relentless recruitment strategy designed and implemented
- Social ministry fair is held on an annual basis (usually in the fall) where a designated Sunday Mass includes an invitation for parishioners to visit with PSM team leaders stationed in the back of church or in the parish hall

11. Is the youth group connected to all social ministry teams with opportunities to do “community service” (especially if this is a school requirement)?

Based on the above assessment, name 3 key strengths:

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Based on the above, name 3 areas of weakness:

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Name 3 things your PSM team could do to better integrate your social ministry work with the rest of your parish.

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Who will do these things and what is your timeline?

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**This assessment is taken from the Diocese of Grand Rapids, *Parish Social Ministry Toolkit*.**

## ORGANIZERS AND DOERS

To understand the role of social ministry leaders, it is essential to understand the difference between “organizers” and “doers”. These two activities are very different and require different characteristics. Please consider... *organizers* tend to do the following activities:

- ❖ Planning
- ❖ Being strategic
- ❖ Recruiting leaders and participants
- ❖ Bringing people together
- ❖ Organizing training sessions on Catholic social teaching and social ministry skills
- ❖ Facilitating problem solving discussions and meetings
- ❖ Visioning
- ❖ Listening and communicating

*Doers* of social ministry are busy with...

- ❖ Putting the solutions into action
- ❖ Being energetic and dedicated to completing tasks
- ❖ Learning ministry skills
- ❖ Deepening their baptismal call to serve through participation in on-going formation
- ❖ Providing input, ideas, data that shapes the planning process

As distinguished from the leaders of social ministry who are the “organizers,” “doers” of social ministry make sure specific tasks get done. The “doers” are the people who make the home visits to the elderly, who collect/distribute the food, who write the letters to the legislators, who attend the rally sponsored by the community organization, who make a trip with fellow parishioners to the sister parish in Haiti. They do not organize the effort, they perform the service. Of course, organizers can be doers and vice versa. However, the critical thing is to know the difference and to make sure the parish has a structure or system that includes leaders, or organizers, who make sure many parishioners have opportunities to become “doers.”

The formation of a full Social Ministry Coordination Team may take a couple of years. It will require a process of visioning and strategic planning, rooted in prayer, Scripture and Catholic social teaching. *JustSkills* would be an excellent process to help prepare the group for this process. What is important is that we get started and not be overly-concerned with our immediate success. The Kingdom of God **is** and **is not yet**.

The Late Bishop Oscar Romero tells us to “Do something, and to do it very well. We plant seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.”

Large sections of this handbook are adapted from the article, *What Should we Do? Organizing a Parish Social Ministry Committee*, by Tom Ulrich and the *Communities of Salt and Light Parish Resource Manual*, USCCB, 1995.

# Parish Respect Life Ministry

“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

– Matthew 5:14

During the beginning days of the Respect Life Program in the early seventies, Terence Cardinal Cooke, revered leader of the Church in the United States, shared his dream that parishes would one day be the lamp stand that would flood the larger communities with the light of justice, compassionate care, and respect for every human life regardless of age or condition.

Cardinal Cooke’s dream holds more urgency than ever. Each day news headlines demonstrate how easily a nation can slide into what Our Holy Father has named a Culture of Death. We who receive the Light in our minds and hearts, on our tongues and in the palm of our hands, cannot let that happen.

It is our hope that the Parish Respect Life Handbook will be helpful. It contains guidance and structural suggestions from the Bishops and their staffs, with descriptions of programs and activities that are flourishing in parishes, many of them within our own Diocese.

Primary resource documents used in preparing this handbook are:

**The Gospel of Life**, Encyclical letter of Pope John Paul II

**Living the Gospel of Life, A Challenge to American Catholics**,

US Bishops 1998

**Faithful for Life**, US Bishops 1997

**Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities**, US Bishops 1975, 1985, 2001

**Statements on Anniversary of Roe v. Wade Decision**,

Florida Bishops 1976-2009

## In the Parish...

*“All together, we must build a new culture of life”* (Gospel of Life, No, 95). Followers of Christ come together in our parishes and unite with each other to become the light of love and truth, shining within our communities. Many Catholic parishes in the United States have pro-life ministries. Much of this organized activity is connected to the Respect Life Program which was initiated by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (then called National Conference, or NCCB) in 1972. At that time, the Bishops knew that an explosion of technologies would challenge our faith and moral tradition. They also foresaw the disregard for life and dignity that increasingly characterizes our society-- including a growing propensity to “dispose of” people whom society views as troublesome or vulnerable. The Bishops have continued to reaffirm this program. They want to provide the Catholic community with adequate guidance and ongoing opportunities for informed discussion and action.



Catholics are energized by their intimate union with Jesus through His Sacraments and His Word. We hunger to know and live out the values of Christ which distinguish us a People of God-- people who treasure life and each other. The Respect Life Program is a well-directed action plan for sharing values and directing energy.

A parish-level Respect Life Program is developed by a core group, under the guidance and authority of the pastor. The group interacts and collaborates with other parish ministries to place a focus on the sanctity of human life and innate dignity of every person. *The Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities: A Campaign in Support of Life* (2001) gives us the following definition for the parish committee:

### **Parish Pro-Life Committee**

*“Actively promoting a renewed respect for human life is the responsibility of every Catholic. The parish pro-life committee assists in a special way by helping to make the parish a center of life, a place where parishioners understand the issues and the importance of meeting the needs of those who are most vulnerable—especially mothers and their unborn children, and those who are seriously ill or dying and their families. It may be a distinct committee, or it might be a subcommittee of another parish organization. Whatever its structure, its membership should include representatives of both adult and youth parish groups, members of organizations that represent persons with disabilities, persons of minority cultures, and those responsible for education and pastoral care.”*

The carefully planned activities welcome the involvement of a constantly growing number of parishioners into service in one or more of the four major areas in *The Pastoral Plan*:

- I. Public Information and Education**
- II. Pastoral Care**
- III. Public Policy**
- IV. Prayer and Worship**

***United within Florida***

**The Bishops of Florida, in addition to serving their own dioceses,** also work collaboratively through the Florida Catholic Conference, which maintains an office and staff in Tallahassee. Each diocesan Pro-Life Coordinator within the seven dioceses in Florida benefits from the direction and assistance of the Florida Catholic Conference. The seven Diocesan respect life offices collaborate closely with each other and with the Florida Catholic Conference in order to assure solidarity in their programs throughout the state.



**... and nationally**

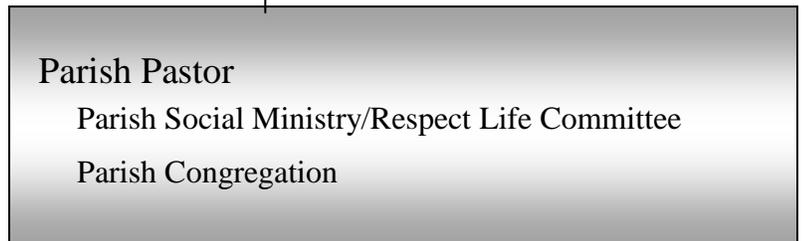
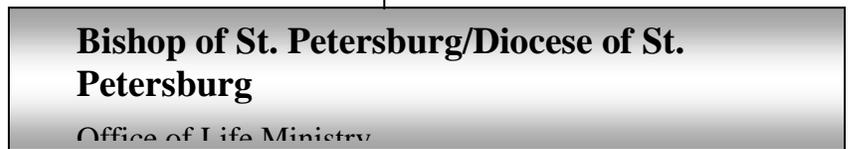
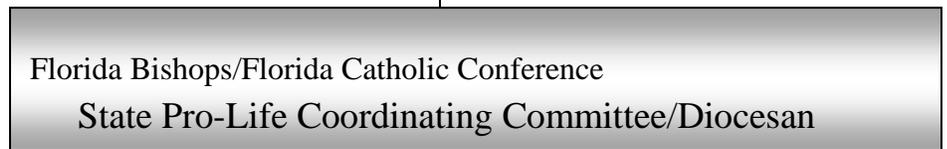
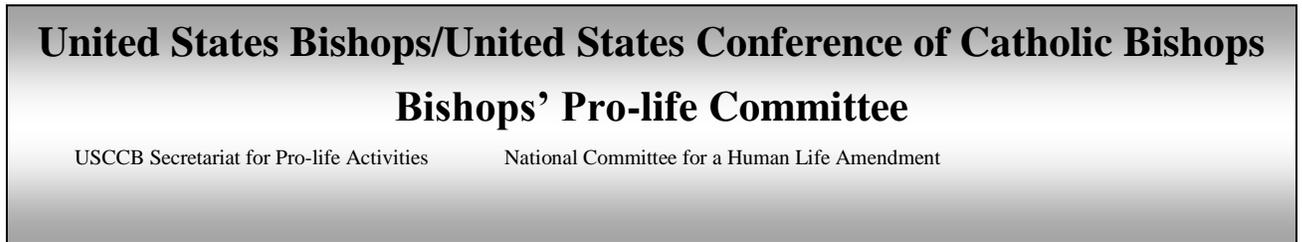
**The Bishops of the United States, in addition to serving their own dioceses,** also work collaboratively through the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). Within that Conference, the Secretariat of Pro-life Activities is comprised of a committee of bishops with staff and consultants. The Secretariat meets several times each year to oversee this important work. They design, implement, and offer this Program each year to all of the dioceses throughout the country.

The Pro-life Committee of Bishops also oversees the National Committee for a Human Life Amendment (NCHLA), a lobbying group registered in the name of the United States Conference of Bishops, to lobby for life issues in the public policy forum.



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**The chart below depicts these organizational levels:**



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**What kind of activities is the committee responsible for coordinating?**

In their statement, *Living the Gospel of Life: A Challenge for American Catholics*, the US Bishops make this observation: *American Catholics have long sought to assimilate into U.S. cultural life. But in assimilating, we have too often been digested. We have been changed by our culture too much, and we have changed it not enough. If we are leaven, we must bring to our culture the whole Gospel, which is a Gospel of life and joy. It is within our parishes that we Catholics are nourished sacramentally. It is there that we find the information and sense of common purpose that will inspire us to bring to our culture the “whole Gospel.., a Gospel of life and joy.”*

 Our parishes will want to balance the four efforts asked for in the *Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities*:

- 1) Providing information and education
- 2) Service through pastoral care
- 3) Opportunity to shape public policies
- 4) Prayer and worship

The task of the Respect Life committee is to weave these varied types of information and activity into the life of the parish so that the parish congregation will have knowledge of and appreciation for: the life of every person from conception to natural death, regardless of age and condition; the material and spiritual needs of the vulnerable in our midst; and the urgency of shaping government policies and cultural attitudes that nurture human life and dignity.

Be creative, and be dedicated to the mission!

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### **1. Providing information in the Parish**

*The Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities calls notes that “An ongoing, long-range, and intensive educational effort in the Catholic community can provide an understanding of the issues and lead people to conviction and conversion... Ultimately, however, moral and theological arguments present the central issue of respect for human life in its most intellectually compelling terms.”*

Two components of education are necessary: 1. **information on the issues**, and 2. **information on the Church’s teaching** regarding the issues. The Roe v. Wade decision that legalized abortion in the United States has put human life at risk for the vulnerable and has coarsened our appreciation for human dignity. In today’s culture, the Catholic community needs to be made aware of human development in the first nine months of life. Further, we need to realize that babies can be aborted legally at any time during those nine months; any rights of the baby and father of the child are superceded by privacy rights of the woman; and the incredible number of abortions that take place locally and in the nation.

*“The Respect Life Program... provides information on critical issues of the day and relates those issues to the Church’s teaching..”* (Pastoral Plan, Sec. I) Related issues increase every year. Some of these are stem cell research; cloning; assisted suicide; euthanasia; capital punishment. The Catholic Church’s unwavering proclamation that every human life is sacred and deserving of the utmost respect demands a defense of that position because the popular culture no longer shares these values. The task of building a

culture of life and a civilization of love begins in the parish and reaches into the community when we embrace and serve people in need, when we speak truth with compassion, and when we advocate public policies that will protect and enhance human life - not use, manipulate or destroy it.

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## **Providing information helps create a life- welcoming and caring parish atmosphere**

 **Let parishioners know in brief, often repeated statements in the parish bulletin how to obtain services** that may be needed (e.g., services for frail elderly, copies of Advance Directives, help for pregnant women in distress, Project Rachel, natural family planning instruction).

 **Find opportunities** (in parish bulletins, education classes, organization meetings) **to provide both brief and lengthy but readable statements** that share:

- 1) the Church's teaching on life issues, and
- 2) the situation in our communities regarding these (e.g., abortion statistics; child/elder abuse and its causes; elderly loneliness and depression; rise in homelessness).

 **Collaborate with the priests:** The homily with a pro-life emphasis could be reinforced by an activity provided by the committee (examples: video after Mass, handing out a flower to members of a certain group, encouraging sign-up for volunteers).

 **Be a community that recognizes and celebrates new life!** Recognize and offer a blessing to pregnant mothers. Set aside special parking for expectant mothers and families with strollers.

 **Show videos** after Mass in Church or at coffee/doughnuts. (These are available at no cost from the Diocesan Library.)

 **Collaborate with the parish Faith Formation Office** to provide information to be used in their programs and in hosting informative seminars (See our Speakers' Bureau or contact the Diocesan office of Life Ministry). Advertise these seminars well in advance and throughout neighboring parishes.

- ☛ **Let's proclaim life to be shared and cared about!** Throughout the country many parishes have shrines that honor Mary as Patroness of the Unborn; monuments to memorialize the unborn who have been lost, plaques that pledge a parish's help to any pregnant woman. Many parishes invite parishioners to share prayers and material help with parishes in third world countries, or develop ministries to support the needy right in the community.
  
- ☛ **Sponsor a Sidewalk Counseling workshop for your parish and the community.** Learn how to advise and guide women and their partners who have come to the clinic to seek an abortion.
  
- ☛ **Let's not forget the children.** The Respect Life committee should assist the school and faith formation classes with special projects and provide the faculty with information from Email updates.

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## Sources of education materials for parishes

Since its inception in 1972, the Respect Life Program has placed a strong emphasis on the accuracy of its material. The staff at the Secretariat for Pro-life Activities at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has developed a reputation for accuracy, consistency and clarity that enables all of us at diocesan and parish levels to distribute their materials without hesitation.

**Annual Packets** are received each year during the late summer months. These packets provide parishes with a thorough set of educational materials on current issues. The content can be used over a period of many months. The *clip art* includes illustrations and brief statements that are useful for the parish bulletin and in classrooms. The *essays* provide an in-depth look at a variety of current issues. The essays can be used for study in classrooms, and there are a variety of ways they can be useful in the parish: one essay per month can be chosen for duplication and insertion into parish bulletins; sections of any of the essay can be reproduced and reprinted in the parish bulletin; the essays can be used for discussion by parish groups.

**Encyclicals and Pastoral Statements** provide clear and inspiring teaching on the human person, life and dignity. Some parishes host study groups for those interested in a deeper understanding.

**Our own Bishop, the Florida Bishops and the Florida Catholic Conference** issue statements and materials which should be provided to parish congregations.

## PARISH PROGRAMS

Many parishes offer a variety of educational programs. These will be most successful if they are carefully planned with the blessing of the pastor and collaboration of other parish leaders. We will mention two models of educational programs:

**Educational Forums** give participants an opportunity to explore a current issue in-depth. These forums also require careful planning to get qualified speakers. The first task is to identify the topic to be covered and when to schedule the program to reach the largest number. Because these forums require an investment of time and energy for yourselves and the speakers, you will want worthwhile numbers to hear the message. Collaborate with other parish ministries and with nearby parishes to increase your audience. The diocesan Office will assist you with planning and speakers.

**Spiritual adoption** combines prayer and community as an important educational component. The congregation is invited to adopt and pray for a child who is in danger of being aborted. Each month the parish bulletin describes the growth of the baby within the womb. Beautiful full color posters are available. Parishioners are encouraged to give the baby a name. A shower of baby items can take place at an appropriate time (seventh, eighth or ninth month is suggested). These baby items can be donated to a local pregnancy center or other families in need. You will find a nine-month program in the resource section of this handbook. Talk to your area coordinator for additional ideas on a variety of ways to present this popular program.



## *Providing information in our COMMUNITIES*

Day after day, in the print media and on our television screens, we see news coverage that is often inaccurate and incomplete, and lacks the understanding that our Catholic values provide us. Perhaps our most pressing challenge is to find effective ways to present accurate information. Reverence for the human person and respect for others that is the hallmark of Christ's life and the Church's teaching is no longer a shared vision in the larger society, and it will not be until believers restore it. The Bishops' Pastoral Plan for Pro-life Activities summons the Church to a "public information effort directed to the general public... This public information effort is necessary to inform public discussion and demonstrate the Church's commitment to a long-range pro-life effort."

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- ♥ Speak up! Encourage parishioners to write letters to the editors of newspapers, magazines, and web sites. Many of our parishioners have a wealth of knowledge and wisdom to bring the light of truth and the welcome of love into the mainstream of society, especially into the media. Committees can use their parish bulletins to invite parishioners to be a part of this ongoing project. It will be even more effective for committee members to extend this invitation one-on-one to parishioners whose background and profession will add to the credibility of the position.
  - ♥ In your own daily work and/or daily contacts, be ready and willing to respond to current news reports that are contrary to the truth about human life and dignity.

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## **2. Service through Pastoral Care**

In their statement, *Faithful for Life*, the Bishops invite all Catholics, individually and collectively, to join them in speaking out "on behalf of neighbors whose lives are devalued: the faceless poor, the hungry children, the neglected elderly." The Bishops also make this pledge:

**"We repeat together (as Bishops) what we have stated individually: no woman in need with a child, born or unborn, whether she is Catholic or not should feel herself without help. We pledge the heart and hands of the Church to help mothers and fathers in need to find pregnancy counseling, pre- and postnatal care, housing and material support, and adoption services."**

The role of the parish Respect Life committee is to assist the pastor in raising consciousness, identifying needs, and energizing the community to support ministries already in place, and design ways to address needs.

*Some steps to take:*

- ✓ Promote pregnancy counseling (for abortion alternatives) as well as information on prenatal care.
- ✓ If possible, develop or adopt a parish-based ministry to pregnant women, pregnant teens, and their children. Gabriel Project would be an excellent example. The Gabriel project is a parish-based apostolate that reaches out to pregnant women in need. Gabriel Angels offer immediate and practical help to any woman faced with an untimely pregnancy.  
<http://www.gabrielproject.com/contacts.htm>
- ✓ Work with the director of your nearest Life Ministry Alliance Pregnancy Centers to determine how your parish might best support their efforts.
- ✓ Promote chastity education and fertility awareness for young people.
- ✓ Promote natural family planning materials and education for married couples.
- ✓ Support post-abortion healing programs in your parish and in the community.
- ✓ Assist in developing or promoting parish nursing or any related health ministries. Respect Life committees should collaborate very closely with them, provide them with information and teaching documents that come to them, and assist in other appropriate ways.
- ✓ Encourage and support parishioners' involvement in services to support those who are chronically ill or dying and their families.
- ✓ Foster efforts to fully welcome people with disabilities into the Church community.
- ✓ Encourage parish support of respite or care centers for the frail elderly, Catholic Charities ministries for persons and families with AIDS, etc.
- ✓ Encourage and support prison ministry and support to family members of prisoners, especially children.
- ✓ Many service ministries already exist to meet the needs of the congregation. Without in any way diminishing their service to parishioners, the ministry might be extended beyond the congregation to needy who live within the parish boundaries (even those of no faith or other faiths.)

## **Parishes collaborating with diocesan and community agencies**

Your committee efforts are needed on an ongoing basis to make known these programs which are serving the communities in your area.

**PROJECT RACHEL.....**A program of reconciliation for anyone who has been involved in an abortion experience. A statewide toll-free number (**1 877-908-1212**) will offer understanding and connect to clergy, counselors and lay people trained to guide a healing journey that brings Reconciliation, grace, a new beginning

**PREGNANCY CENTERS....** Support the Life Ministry Alliance pregnancy centers in your area. Distribute their brochures within your- parish boundaries. Call the Office of Life Ministry to learn more about these centers. **They need encouragement and support (volunteer workers, financial and prayers).**

### ***3. Opportunity to shape PUBLIC POLICY***

*In the Gospel of Life, Pope John Paul II reminds us that, “Although laws are not the only means of protecting human life, nevertheless they do play a very important and sometimes decisive role in influencing patterns of thought and behavior.” (Gospel of Life, No. 90) This is why the Pastoral Plan calls for a Public Policy Program to restore respect for human life in our society.*

*In their booklet entitled *Living the Gospel of Life: A Challenge for American Catholics*, the United States Bishops elaborate on this: “Good people frequently disagree on which problems to address, which policies to adopt, and how best to apply them. But for citizens and elected officials alike, the basic principle is simple: We must begin with a commitment never to intentionally kill or collude in the killing, of any innocent human life, no matter how broken, unformed, disabled or desperate that life may seem.” And, finally, in their Statement on Political Responsibility entitled *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, the Bishops point out: “In the Catholic tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue and participation in the political process is a moral obligation.”*

***“Only the tireless promotion of the truth about the human person can infuse democracy with the: right values. This is what Jesus meant when he asked us to be leaven in society.”***

Living the Gospel of Life...,  
US Bishops

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In our pluralistic society, our legislators represent many and sometimes disparate values. Experience over the past quarter century has demonstrated that in many instances they will not enact the essential respect for human life into law unless we make it clear to them that these positions have our overwhelming support. Keep in mind that the legislators are *heavily lobbied* to vote otherwise. Advocacy on behalf of the vulnerable, weak, and marginalized is an act of charity and a visible sign of concern for others.

Our national, state, and local Bishops encourage us to communicate with our legislators regarding many issues of paramount importance for human life, death, and dignity. Legislators have to deal with so many issues and so many pieces of legislation that they are often unfamiliar with the substance of what they are asked to vote on. The communications and insights of their constituents, respectfully offered, can be very helpful to them.

The lobbyists who represent the Bishops emphasize that legislators need to hear from their constituents (the people who live in their districts). That is why we ask the local Catholic communities to become involved. The Catholic Conference staffs (national and state) provide very clear and brief overviews of each proposed statute or amendment. Our diocese has a newly trained Social Action Team ready to make district office visits when key issues arise. You may be called up to join them as a constituent. Social Ministry and Respect Life Committees are also encouraged to:

- Promote the legislative advocacy networks of organizations such as the Florida Catholic Conference, the United States Catholic Conference, the National Committee for a Human Life Amendment and Catholic Relief Services.
- Develop a system for communicating legislative action alerts (i.e. phone tree, bulletin announcement or website posting) for those who are unable to receive Email Action Alerts.
- Invite local elected officials to meet with parishioners about important local issues or invite speakers to discuss church teaching on public policy issues.
- Send a delegation to Catholic Days at the Capitol in Tallahassee each March. Every year during the Florida Legislative Session, the Bishops of Florida concelebrate a Red Mass for those who serve our state government. The Bishops invite Catholic lay people from around the state to join them at the Mass to thank God and to invoke His assistance for these public officials. In addition, the Bishops host a luncheon for Catholic legislators and the laity from their districts. The visitors are encouraged to visit their legislators at the Capitol.
- On occasion, the nature of pending legislation and/or a specific legislative situation may call for an intensive public outcry in an effort to either support or defeat legislation being considered. These requests for parish-wide campaigns will always originate from the diocesan Office of Life Ministry on behalf of the Bishops, never from other pro-life groups. By maintaining a visible respect life effort in your parish and keeping parishioners aware of issues, you can help make people more receptive and responsive to these diocese-wide appeals for support in the form of written postcards/letters.

In an election year:

- Parish bulletin notices placed in advance of the deadlines for registration can urge everyone to make sure that they are registered to vote, and encourage voting on Election Day.
- Arrange for those who are unable to travel outside their homes to be registered. This should be advertised in the parish bulletin.
- Assist shut-ins in getting their absentee ballots and have drivers available to help others to the polls. This service, too, should be advertised in the parish bulletin. This is a good project for collaboration with the parish's women's guild, Holy Name, Knights of Columbus, and/or other church-affiliated service groups.
- Sponsor a nonpartisan voter registration drive (refer to the Florida Catholic Conference Election and Political Activities Guide).

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*Consider passing on Email action alerts and/or using a telephone tree to urge support or action on a particular bill. Contact the Office of Life Ministry for information on how to sign up for Email action Alerts and how to form a Telephone Tree.*

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#### **4. Service through Prayer and Worship**

Christ's life demonstrated that the power of prayer is essential as a source of strength and the foundation of all good works. Prayer is the foundation of all pro-life/respect life activity. A parish Respect Life committee will find many opportunities and ideas for prayer, as individuals, as committee, and together as parish.

Following is a partial listing of the many types of prayer-based parish activities that are encouraged:

† The first Sunday in October is designated by the Bishops as an annual **Respect Life Sunday** throughout the United States. A liturgy guide and suggestions will be provided. January 22, the anniversary date of the Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion, is another very important opportunity for prayer. Ask your pastor to consider a special homily and prayers at the Masses on the weekend closest to that date.

† Brief Prayers of the Faithful during daily and weekend Masses that intercede for the vulnerable and marginalized. The **Word of Life**, a series

of Prayers of the Faithful and bulletin inserts, is provided monthly from the USCCB Pro-Life Secretariat. Speak to your parish secretary to make sure that this is being received. These can also be found online or downloaded at: <http://www.usccb.org/prolife/liturgy/wolarchive.shtml> Special intercessions are also recommended at weekday Masses (and the Sunday liturgy closest to) a state execution.

† Holy Hours, Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, and Benediction Services, on First Fridays and other occasions, are offered on behalf of human life in many parishes.

† Special prayers, litanies, and novenas, including prayers and prayer services for parents who have lost a child, prayers for the sick and dying. Some models are available on request from the diocesan Office of Life Ministry.

† A spiritual adoption program invites us to spiritually adopt a baby recently conceived who is in danger of being aborted. There are a variety of prayers that have been composed for those who want one, but it is primarily a prayer of the heart and mind in solidarity with baby and Mom. A spiritual adoption program for parishes that combines information regarding fetal development with prayer can be found in the Appendix. Resources for Spiritual Adoption (posters, etc.) can be found at the Archdiocese of Baltimore website: <http://www.archbalt.org/respect-life/spiritual-adoption/index.cfm>

† Healing Mass for the sick and shut-ins. Some parishes arrange transportation for those who otherwise could not be there.

† In many parishes, Rosaries on behalf of human life are said before or after daily Mass, and on other occasions.

† Prayer services to end capital punishment and prayer vigils for state-sponsored executions demonstrate the dignity and respect for all human life.

† Ask the homebound, hospitalized and nursing home residents to pray daily for an increased respect for the Culture of Life. Give them prayer pamphlets and updates on your ministry.

† Sponsor or participate in a prayer vigil at an abortion clinic. i.e. Helpers of God's Precious Infants Rosary walk, 40 Days for Life

† Pilgrimages in thanksgiving for life. Within Florida, in St. Augustine the Shrine of Our Lady of La Leche is a popular pilgrimage destination. The statue of Our Lady nursing the Child Jesus was brought by a Spanish sailor concerned for his pregnant wife in the sixteen century. The church built on the grounds is dedicated both to life and to peace. This is the site of the Florida March for Life, held on the weekend before the anniversary of Roe v. Wade.